

Epistemic authority and textual traditions: history of ideas and philosophy

Jan Opsomer

1. Various legitimate approaches to the history of philosophy:

1. Antiquarian history of philosophy,
 - but preferably not 'bewahrend und verehrend'
 - conservation without mummification.
2. Philological study of philosophical texts
3. Historical study of philosophical practices
4. Historical role of philosophers in society and culture
5. Intellectual history
6. History of ideas
7. Rational reconstructions of arguments, doctrines, theories
8. Philosophical history of philosophy
9. Contemporary philosophers using (parts of) the history of philosophy. Using history as a heuristic instrument.

Some theses:

1. There are numerous legitimate ways of studying the history of philosophy.
2. They can coexist peacefully.
3. Different approaches or types are tied to different goals. Some aim at relevance for contemporary philosophical debates, others don't (even they *could* of course be useful for contemporary philosophy nonetheless, whether immediately or in the future, directly or indirectly).
4. Since not all forms of historical philosophical research need to be relevant for contemporary debates, scholars should not let themselves be cornered into an apologetic position.
5. Different types of study require different methods.
6. Abilities and competences required for the various sub-disciplines and approaches are different, but there are overlaps.
7. The overlap in expertise required for different approaches enables (as a necessary condition) that scholars/philosophers move between them.
8. Scholars of the history of philosophy should reflect on the approach(es) they use and should explicate the relation between the results obtained and the aims and methods of their scholarship.
9. The principle of charity, which is used in all types of historical scholarship, should be diversified in accordance with the specific aims set for a given project.

2. Preliminary semantic distinctions

- The word 'authority' can refer to
 - a certain quality attributed to someone or something (an institution, a text, a text corpus, or a textual/oral tradition),
 - or alternatively, to the persons or things that possess this quality, such as when we speak about the authorities to which an author refers.
- An even more common use in contemporary parlance is the authority or authorities as a person or group that wields power or exercises a right over others (a governmental authority, the persons or bodies that have legislative or executive powers; 'the authorities'),
- the position that commands such a power or right,

- or this power or right as it is delegated ('to have the authority to')
- executive (moral, legal, political, religious) and epistemic authority.

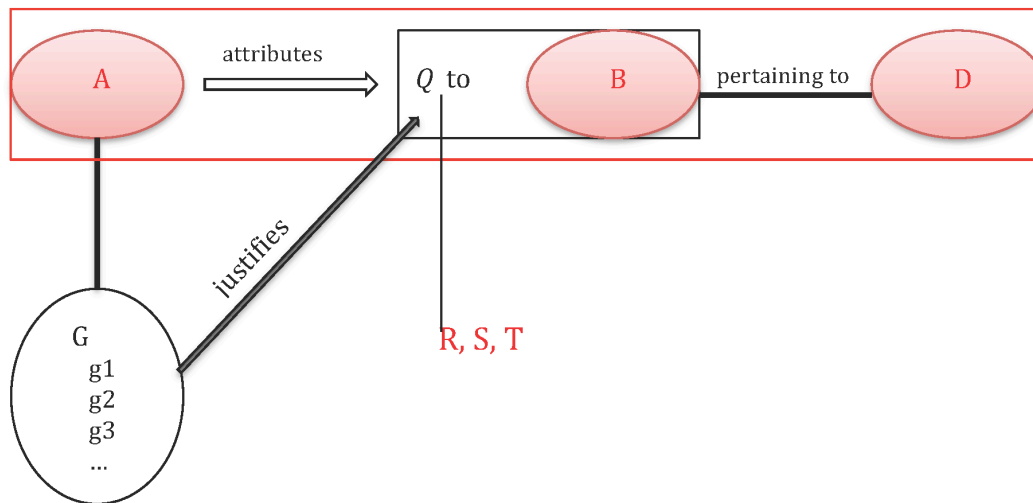
3. A model for studying epistemic authority in textual traditions

Ontologically, Epistemic Authority is a ternary relation, $R(A, B, D)$, involving

1. The person who attributes authority (A)
2. The person or the thing in whom authority is invested, the bearer of authority, sometimes called 'the authority' (B)
3. The domain over which authority is attributed (D).

If we look in addition to the epistemological aspect, it becomes clear that also the grounds or reasons on which the attribution is based (G) should be specified, as well as the quality of the authority relation (Q):

4. The type of authority that is attributed, i.e. the epistemic quality [Q] of the authority relations (R, S, T).
5. The grounds (reasons) [G] for the attribution.



4. A competence for (epistemic) authority

5. Epistemic authority as a social phenomenon

6. Epistemic authority in textual traditions